



## **WE Invest Class Profiles**

### **Judith Elizondo**

Judith Elizondo is currently enrolled in Paso a Paso in our Fruitvale location. She has lived in the Bay Area for seven years and moved here from her native Mexico. When she first arrived she worked at the Mexican Consulate for four years. Now, Judith runs her own small business.

Her business sells Mexican import products. Currently, she operates catalogue style but as she gets more established, she hopes to open a store front in Oakland, possibly in the Fruitvale district. Her business sells primarily cowboy boots, shirts and other clothing and accessories.

Through her Women's Initiative course, Judith is learning how to be more financially established and manage her money better. Judith is very enthusiastic to advance her business and she knows that often one has a great idea but no way to move forward. She is happy to have found Women's Initiative, which is teaching her more about business and providing her with the tools she needs to begin her project.

### **Dayana Samon**

Dayana Samon came to the Bay Area from Guantanamo, Cuba four years ago with her seven year old daughter. In Cuba she began law school but did not have the opportunity to finish. She worked as a librarian.

When she first arrived in the United States, Dayana cleaned office buildings with a janitorial service. She currently works as a filing clerk at a company that makes orthopedic parts for animals and people. She is also enrolled at the College of Alameda and studies information systems and English.

Dayana heard about Women's Initiative when she first arrived in the Bay Area but she was unable to start the program until this past January. Today, she feels fortunate to learn from a teacher who supports her and whose positive attitude is contagious! Now she sees step-by-step what it will take to open a successful business and is actively working to achieve her goals.

She plans to open a perfume business when she graduates in May but ultimately would like to have her own graphic design firm. Giving back to her community has always been important to her and she plans to work with other Latinas to help them achieve their dreams.

### **Lisa de Geneste**

Lisa de Geneste is currently enrolled in the Simple Steps course in the downtown Oakland office. Prior to moving to the Bay Area two and a half years ago, Lisa spent 26 years in New York City, where she moved by herself from her native Trinidad.

Lisa has wanted to start a business for several years but knew that she wouldn't be successful without concrete information and guidance. Lisa decided to start the Women's Initiative program when she lost her job as a social worker at a domestic violence prevention agency in San Mateo County.

She plans to start a retail business that sells artisan made products for the home, art and furniture. Lisa hopes to buy products from artisans in the United States and abroad, specifically India, and countries in the Caribbean and Africa. Eventually, she wants to open a store front, but plans to start her business making online sales. Lisa sees her business idea as one that will give others the opportunity for social entrepreneurship by highlighting the vendors she works with and by making sure the money she makes goes back to them.

Growing up Lisa's mom had a similar retail business in Trinidad and Lisa remembers being amazed by the beautiful objects she sold. Lisa is very happy with the business skills she has learned at Women's Initiative, but her favorite part of the class is the group dynamic. She feels that her class has the opportunity to talk and learn together from a very knowledgeable coach. She values that the program provides challenging information and forces you to think about every minute detail of your business. She finds the business planning tool very useful.

Lisa plans to give back once her business is up and running. She wants to start a scholarship program for other Women's Initiative clients and hopes to start by funding four women a year. Lisa describes herself as being on a mission. She can't wait to be her own boss and knows that if she keeps her eyes ahead and stays focused, she will be successful.

### **Denisha Powell**

Denisha Powell learned to be a baker when she was eighteen through a City College of San Francisco program. For the past five years, Denisha has been working as a bakery supervisor at the

Ritz Carlton. She started a business training program at another Bay Area based organization but couldn't complete it because she is a single mom and works nights. Now, she takes an evening training course at our downtown Oakland office. She learned about Women's Initiative on the radio and it seemed like a perfect program to help her achieve her dreams.

Denisha is from San Francisco but currently lives in Antioch with her four year old son. Her business will sell ready to bake frozen products to whole sale vendors like hotels and restaurants. She plans to focus on pastries like croissants, Danishes and pie crusts. She will create products that you can put in the oven from the freezer. She plans to give back to her community by creating a trade skills based training program for low-income youth. She plans to employ high school youth to create job development in her community.

Denisha says that she has been writing down ideas for twelve years but has never had the opportunity to launch her business. Women's Initiative is helping her achieve her dream by giving her the tools she needs to formulate her ideas and break down her business plan. Her biggest challenge has been the research and advertising. Denisha has already put a deposit on the commercial kitchen that she will use to run her business. Since starting the Simple Steps course she has started putting ideas on paper and moving forward.

### **Maria Martinez**

Maria Martinez is currently enrolled in Paso a Paso course, our program designed specifically for Latina entrepreneurs taught in Spanish. Maria is taking the course the Women's Initiative training site in Oakland's Fruitvale district. She moved to the Bay Area from Columbia seven years ago and has been working in a real estate office. She currently lives in Union City with her husband.

Maria had always wanted to open an expressive therapy center but did not have the opportunity to pursue her dream in her county. She is happy to begin advancing her dreams through Women's Initiative. She has experience with art therapy and working with the right side of the brain. With her therapy program, she has helped her clients overcome various challenges in their lives from cigarette smoking to facing their biggest fears.

Today, Maria treats her clients out of a room in her home. In the future she hopes to open a center that would be more conducive to advancing her work. She dreams of having a site that clients can visit and feel more relaxed.

After completing the Paso a Paso course, Maria hopes to expand her knowledge of art therapy. Funding limitations cause her to struggle with advancing her business but with the help of Women's Initiative she has learned business skills she never knew about. She now realizes that business success is based on accountability and focus.